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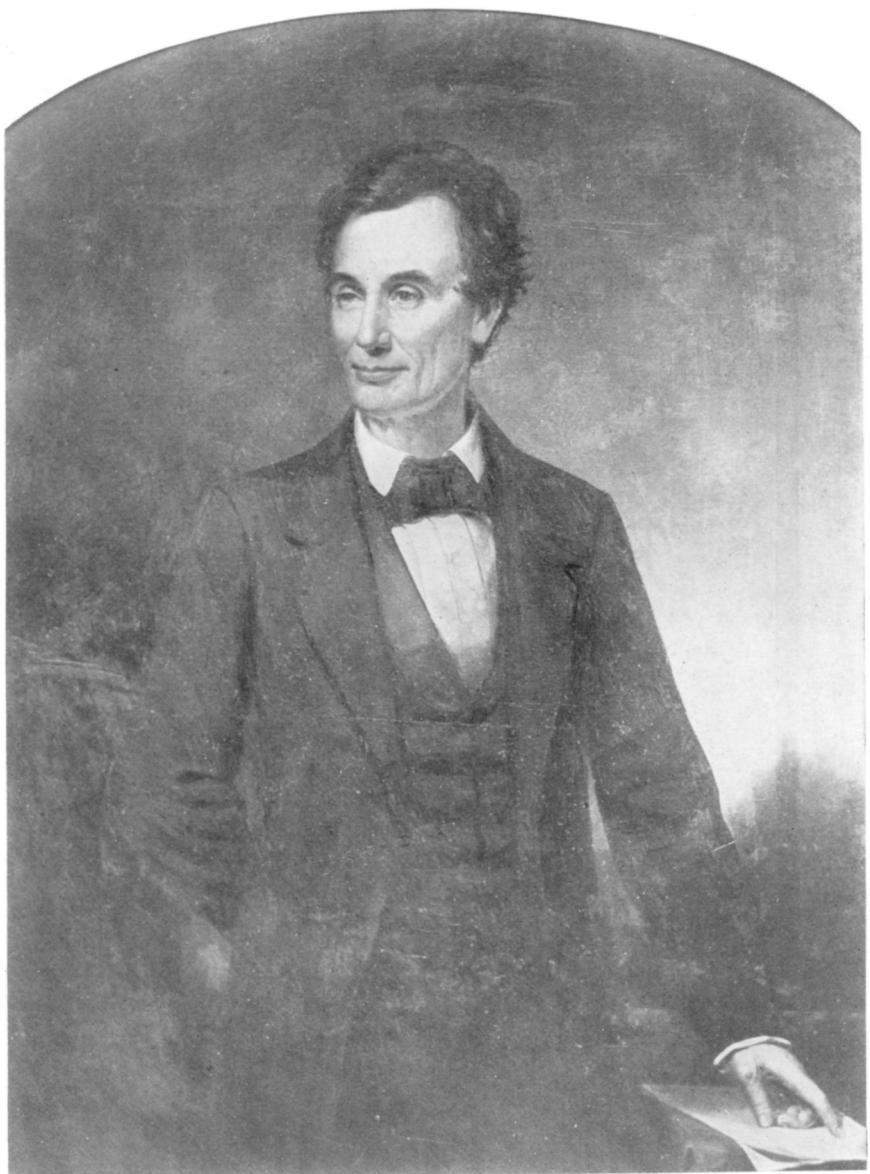
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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Abraham Lincoln

By NORMAN G. FLAGG

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED ON LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1917, AT SHURTLEFF COLLEGE, UPPER ALTON, ILLINOIS, AT WHICH TIME A PORTRAIT OF MR. LINCOLN, OWNED BY THE COLLEGE, WAS REHUNG.

"Shurtleff College and the College Alumni honor themselves today in thus honoring Lincoln. At any time and in any place on American soil, it is appropriate that any American citizen should pay a tribute to the memory of the greatest American figure of the nineteenth century, and it is especially appropriate on this, his birthday, and on this spot revered for eighty years as a center of educational influence and of good citizenship, that we should pause a few moments at least, and witness this pleasing ceremony.

"Today, throughout our land, multitudes of our fellow citizens meet to speak the name of Lincoln, and to tell the sad and glorious story of his life—a story which surpasses in interest and in wonder any fairy tale ever framed by the human mind. In assemblies such as this there is being told the triumphant progress from the Kentucky log cabin to the White House of the plebian Lincoln—a plebian by birth, but a patrician in character—for it must have been of Abraham Lincoln that the author was thinking when he said: 'The question is not: Art thou of the nobility, but is there nobility in thee?'

"In gatherings like this the American people are today marking the contrast between the coming of Lincoln to Springfield—on a borrowed horse, and with all his earthly possessions in his saddlebags—and his final departure from Springfield in 1861 to assume the duties of President. Or they are today listening to the reading of that matchless specimen of pure English, simple and concise, the Gettysburg speech, or to the beautiful letter of consolation written by the President to

the Widow Bixby, who had lost her five sons in the Civil War—a letter which is used in Oxford University as a specimen of the purest Anglo-Saxon.

“Possibly these American audiences are today hearing the sad, sad story of Lincoln’s affairs of the heart, or, on the other hand, are being regaled with some of his truly numerous tales.

“And today we are reminded anew of the attitude assumed by members of Lincoln’s cabinet towards their President; they were too sophisticated to understand the simple and straightforward Lincoln, and they could not understand that a statesman and politician could be really honest and candid and sincere. Today a myriad of Lincolnian traits and Lincolnian experiences are being pictured to our American citizenship—the removal in 1816 from the Kentucky cabin to another cabin in Spencer County, Indiana, where the mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died; the trip in 1830 in the prairie schooner to the prairies of Macon County, Illinois; the experiences as a flat-boatman, a rail-splitter, as a clerk studying the borrowed law books in leisure moments; as a volunteer and captain in the Black Hawk War; as a member of the Illinois Legislature at Vandalia for three terms; as a member of Congress for one term only; and as a practicing attorney, who was never adjudged by others of that profession to be a good lawyer because of his refusal to charge large fees, if in fact, any at all.

“It was Lincoln himself who said, ‘My early life was characterized in a single line of Gray’s Elegy: ‘The short and simple annals of the poor.’’’ And he also tells us that the aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year. Of himself he also says, ‘If any personal description of me is thought desirable, I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average 180 pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes; no other marks or brands recollected.’

“With these earlier reminiscences of Lincoln we couple, in strange contrast, the career of the same man from 1856 to 1865—a decade of miraculous development in his career, when his native endowments and his vast wealth of wisdom, acquired by experience and observation, truly came into their own. What tale of fiction can equal the true story of Lincoln? As the years go by, affording us a more true perspective of

his life and work, the name of Lincoln is more and more revered; his fame becomes greater and grander, and the ruthless tests of time and history find in him no flaws. Few of us indeed can hope to be even remembered a century after our birth, whatever our advantages or achievements may be. Here before us is the portrait of a man whose name, 108 years after his birth, is known in every corner of the earth, and whose star becomes brighter and brighter each year among the constellation of the immortals—one of our fellow citizens, who proved to the world that kings and potentates can not approach in genuine royalty that God-made product, a true man.

“Is it not possible that advantages (so-called) are in many instances disadvantages? Does it not seem that the greater opportunities the less we are inclined to embrace them? Does not character develop best in an atmosphere of denial, of struggle, of drudgery? Lincoln was no great genius; he developed slowly and logically. His intellectual equipment was the result of years of struggle, but he had, by the gift of God, that divine attribute, met with none too often in this world of ours—common sense. And with this precious trait was coupled a strength of character which enabled him to overcome obstacles. He was honest, he was good-natured, he was sincere; he was kind of heart, he was a lover of his fellow-men; he was so great and still so humble; so simple and still so shrewd; so human, and still so closely approaching the divine.

“No words of mine nor of yours can adequately picture Lincoln, but one thing we can do, all of us, and to the student body who honor us with their presence here today I would especially address myself—we can try to emulate his example. We can try each day to be kind, to be honest, to be sincere, to be sensible, to be lovers of mankind, to embrace our vast opportunities, and furthermore to take a practical interest in this land which Lincoln had a large share in leaving intact for us. And especially in this international crisis which threatens to involve our country, should the spirit of Lincoln be invoked.

“As the United States needed Lincoln fifty years ago to free a race from bondage, so today is the world in urgent need of a Lincoln who shall strike the shackles of a devilish militarism from the limbs of a suffering, bleeding and sorrowing humanity. Were Lincoln alive today, I imagine he would

repeat, almost verbatim, those soul-stirring words of his first inaugural, when he appealed to the South, as follows: ‘We are not enemies, but friends; we must be friends; though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearth-stone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.’

“Friends, as we today go our respective ways from this happy occasion, let us ponder well the story of Lincoln. Let each one of us draw his own lesson, and apply it practically to himself. Let us try to make good—each in his allotted place and station, be it high or low—so that it may finally be said of us, not merely that we have led a blameless life, and not merely that we have each filled his little niche in the world, but that, like Lincoln, we have done our very best with the opportunities given us.”